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BAMBOO CURTAINS
ANNA HECKSCHER NEWBOLD

Contemporary Poets (8)

Bamboo Curtains

BY

ANNA HECKSCHER NEWBOLD
(“MARIE BORDEAUX”)



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DEDICATED TO
“None other gods.....”

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BAMBOO CURTAINS

Bamboo Curtains

MONGOLIAN LAMENT

The hollow click of bamboo curtains, dripping
Against the fragile outlines of your form;
The false warmth of a lamp of scarlet swinging,
Promising more than shelter from the storm.
These are my cursed memories of you!

Slowest of smiles and opium-sweet caresses,
Exquisite, pale Deceiver of that smoke-filled
room,
Behind those useless, rattling, mocking curtains
You stood and beckoned me to greater doom.
Surely my eyes deceived me,—did you sever
That yellow rainfall? Could it then be true
Your jeweled hands parted and tossed it back-
ward,
Or did that trembling wall but sever you—
Slicing your figure into narrow fragments,
Clinging and bowing, loath to let you through?
I hardly know. I only know you neared me,
My living flower of the dead bamboo!
And now the hollow click of bamboo curtains
Assures me that your soul was hollow too!

ABANDON

I crown myself with flowers
That you may rend my crown;
I pile my hair up higher
That you may tear it down.
My arms wait all the whiter
For bruises from your clasp;
My song dies all the sweeter
When stifled in your grasp.
I teach my heart to beat for you
That it may never tire;
I purify my soul that you
May blacken it with fire!

SIXTEEN

Sickeningly sweet ice-cream sodas,
Sickeningly sweet lifted eyes—
Ruffles, serge coats and “duck” trousers,
Dances, refreshments, and flies!
Moonlight and slow-swinging hammocks,
Laughter and then a caress
Yet we recall those sweet moments
Only with bitterness!

MISSIONARY OF THE SOUTH SEAS

"These are our Islands
We are the Ruling Race!"

It was not as our Missionary
Spoke of the place.
I was there when the Church-Board claimed
He had failed in his quest,
And his words wandered back in our minds—
"I have failed—with the rest."
Our Rector demanded impatiently that he explain,
And the young man spoke dreamily, with no
reserve,
And without even shame.
"I wonder if you ever chanced to hear
Those voices on a pulsing, perfumed night,
A wail of instruments, dragged into sound?
Tyranny! That's all that can be found
In such persistent murmurs of delight.
Here are those gold-skinned choir girls of ours,
Decking their raven hair with scarlet flowers.
How could I speak of Day—to eyes of night?
We are the ruling race, yet we succumb
So gladly to their subtle mastery.
What are the secrets of the witchery
Which leaves the will inert and conscience dumb
Stealing between the words of Luke and John?
We crush the flower but its scent floats on!
Often at Evening Service one could hear
Their ukeleles sobbing while I preach.
It seemed as if the very waves rose up
And called my congregation to the beach
Where shameless hula-girls like ocean birds,
Skimmed o'er the waters of all passion's tide.
Smooth insults flung from young Hawaiian gods

Tore the last vestige of our foreign pride.
Savage to Savage! Yet were we civilized
Until these Islands drugged us like strong wine.
The ruling race who serves with rapturous joy
Its slaves who turned their masters into swine."

BAMBOO CURTAINS

"NOTRE DAME"

(Parisian Sketch)

Waxen fingers clasped in prayer,
 Madeleine and Cecile;
I have seen you kneeling there—
 Madeleine and Cecile.
In the dim cathedral-light,
Faces both Madonna-white,
Tearful eyes that once were bright—
 Madeleine and Cecile!

Marble shoulders unadorned,
 Madeleine and Cecile—
Faces which no longer mourned,
 Madeleine and Cecile.
Have you left your souls behind
For old Notre Dame to "mind"?
Many roads to heaven find—
 Madeleine and Cecile!

TO THE SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION
OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

A thousand velvet eyes aglow with thanks,
A thousand tiny paws in welcome waved,
An orchestra of barks and neighs and purrs
Struck up, and maddest gayety betrayed!
Each satin nose will press its owner's hand,
Such happiness and frolic will abound
When old S. P. C. A. meets all its friends
At last, within their Happy Hunting Ground!

PRIÈRE D'ARTISTE

Live on, oh Church of Rome! Live on and keep
The spirit of the Old-World in your walls;
Dim and mysterious your twilight falls
Upon my soul, as on the weary, sleep.
The deafening song of that New-World without
Dies; I hear the Latin of your chants arise.
In unison, the tear-drops from my eyes
Fall with wax tears of tapers all about.
Maria, spare me from the fear my heart
Possesses for the spirit of this land;
I am alone and helpless, in the band,
Of these strange citizens that know not Art!
Mid your majestic walls, O Church, I bow
In prayer before the shrine of Him who gave
Sight to the blind. Help me that I may save
The love of beauty in this nation now!
But if I fail, look still on Her with grace,
Judge gently the confession I may give;
As long as you remain Europe shall live—
Here, where her child no longer knows her face!

MY LOVERS

My cat brought in a mouse that she had caught
the other night,

Her strategy and skill I did applaud with forced
delight

And praised her for this gruesome and this most
unwelcome sight—

“My cat,” I said, “your cunning is sublime!”

And so it is, sweetheart, I drag before your
majesty,

The many hearts I captured with such skill and
strategy;

So don't be jealous—these are but my spoils I
let you see,

To hear you say: “She's clever, but she's mine!”

BIZARRE

My soul is like a hot-house flower,
Forced to a strange exotic bloom,
Reared in a tropic paradise
By a magician of perfume.

By a mad God of Concentration,
Striving to consummate the spark
Which might live a thousand life-times
Twixt the daylight and the dark!

Only the hottest sun can warm me,
Only a deluge quench my thirst;
For my heart must first be breaking
Ere my petals start to burst.

So I stand, alone and waiting,
Super-flower, super-soul.
Why should I, whose stem is frailest,
Pay the heaviest toll?

THE HYPNOTIST

As though a window has been closed
Hushing the traffic of the street,
Your presence hushed the World's discord—
Spread velvet 'neath its weary feet;
Muffling all sound except the song
The wings of your strong soul would make,
Drugging my very spirit, till—
Only my senses were awake!
So great in mesmerism seems
Your touch, in its narcotic art,
I am contented, just to hear
The beating of your heart!

LEÇON D'AMOUR

I dreamt that Experience came one time
And stayed my hand from its cup of wine,
Snatched it away ere my lips it passed—

“My child,” she proclaimed, “you drink too
fast!

For the lesson of Joy can be learned too late

When Love has departed and fastened the gate,
And the words of its text are: ‘Withhold! With-
hold!’

For a heart disclosed is a tale soon told!”

FUTILITY

Entreat a match to hold its dying flame—
Pray that a rose's petals may not fall—
Beseech a rushing cataract to halt—
And yet—such prayers Life wrenches from us all!

I WISH

I wish my love for you were like a bridge,
Swung high above Life's cruel, stormy sea,
Where you could walk in safety to the end,
Protected from the breakers' treachery.
Two sentinels would guard its iron gates,
Lowering their rifles only when you came
And gave the password, and that word would be:
"Marie."

I wish my love for you were like the charm
That made Achilles proof against ill-fate,
To clothe you in an armor which the darts
Of enemies would never penetrate.
Impenetrable—yet not quite immune
To any arrow I might once insert.
I hardly know which is the sweetest right,
The right to love you—or the right to hurt!

MEDIAEVAL RHYME

Fire and snow are all lovers,
Freezing and melting each other,
Torturing and robbing each other—
Fire and Snow.

Weakness and strength are the lovers,
Wounding and succoring each other,
Tending one moment, uprooting another
All that they sow.

Ruthless destroyers of each other,
During their lives are the lovers
Slowly defacing each other—
Like fire and snow.

Yet in destroying each other—
With equal persistence the lovers
Immortalize then one another,
And into the cloud-lands go!

DUAL

Your soul is like a sombre scene in Scotland,
So utterly its secrets you disguise—
No one would guess that stern and barren spirit
Concealed an Oriental Paradise!

RAGTIME

You and I on a polished floor,
And a big Marimba band,
Answering its syncopated call
We so well understand.
The colored lights above us wink
Like eyes of little elves.
We'll surely set the world on fire—
If we don't catch fire ourselves!

HELPLESS

How can they tell—the victims,
The right wife from the wrong,
When never the same two sirens
Lure with the same sweet song!

GHOSTS

Yes, I will scream if they leave me alone,
Alone with Thought!
Torturing phantom that terrors and leaves me
All over-wrought.

Blow out the candle, and fancy me slumbering,
Exit, and fasten the door.
Leave me alone? Never had I more company—
Guests, by the score!

Their wan faces madden me; now fickle Memory
Comes to their aid!
Ah, Death and Sleep, have you too, forgotten
This prisoner of shade?

Yes, go! and I'll kill myself;
From the house fly!
Never was murderer
Haunted as I!

What will I do, if they leave me alone with them,
Too weak to kill myself, too strong to scream?
Temptingly Death and Sleep hold out their arms
to me,
For in my living death, they're but a dream!

THE BOHEMIANS

“Where shall we be six years from now?”

We had laughed at the thought, we three,
In a small café at our shilling lunch,
Alfred and Roger and me!

We smiled at our fellow-students
As they argued and fought about Art,
And the Indian prince in a corner
Blew his cigarette smoke in my heart!

Alfred assured us the stew was “cat,”
Roger in Scottish disdain,
Sneered and beseeched him to “leave it at that”
Or none of the guests would remain!
But Alfred the witty, must force us to laugh
Over and over again.

“Where shall we be six years from now?”

They answered with little delay:
Alfred, “I’ll have the Prix de Rome
And live at the Grand Palais!”

“A house in the Highlands of Inverness,”
Said Roger, eyes dreamily gray:
“But you,” they assured, “will abandon your Art
For love in a cottage some day!”

And now that those years have drifted by
With that care-free life we led,
I think Fate smiled at the prophecy
That we hurled upon her head;
For Roger is off to the great World War,
And Alfred, the smiling—is dead.
Six years! Six years to find the key
To our house of dreams—but we laughed, we
three!

MIDNIGHT

Only the cat is home, before the fire,
 Curled in a fluffy ball of great content;
The clock, unwound, tells a forgotten hour,
 Little perceiving where the hour went.
Only the cat to judge, at the crackling fire,
 The folly of the way that hour was spent.

Poor Cinderella, in her rags and tatters,
 Weeping so sadly for her small glass shoe,
The great Prince would not heed such trifling
 matters,
 So useless would it be to him—or you.
The gray cat shakes the tears away in patience
 That drop upon his head like falling dew.
Poor Cinderella, in her rags and tatters,
 What could she mean to that great Prince—or
 you?

DISCOVERY

I think the "Waters of Eternal Youth"
Must mean the Sea!
Its romping waves forever make
A child of me.
And when upon their backs I ride
And kick with glee,
I know the "Waters of Eternal Youth"
Must mean the Sea!

VACATION

Oh, I should give the world to stand
On the steps of a swift "express,"
And wave farewell to familiar scenes,
In the "chic-est" traveling dress!
With plenty of time for a long, long trip
And plenty of gowns to brag,
With a dazzling sun in an azure sky—
And a bathing suit in my bag!
Oh, to arrive at a great hotel—
With a French boudoir reserved—
On an island of palms and youthful guests,
Round which a long beach curved.
And the starlit nights, and the dancing-groves,
And the cigarette-scented breeze,
And the jingling key in our bedroom door
When dawn steals through the trees!
"Love in a cottage" wearies me much,
Marriage? Don't ask me again;
But You I elect above all the rest,
For my Holiday-Comrade, then!

CONFESSION

Alone on my prie-dieu, nightly
I kneel to confess my sins,
But the only prayer that is fervent
Is the one which my heart begins:
Beloved, may I ever be:

Silence and Song to you,
Present and Past to you,
Both Right and Wrong to you,
First and the Last with you—
Fever and Calm to you,
Burning and Balm to you—
Idol and Slave.

Guarding like angels true
All the great soul of you;
Future on earth to you—
Life after death for you
Over the grave!

THE GHOST DESTROYER

I am so much afraid of the terrible Dark
That I crouch in a corner with fear,
The ghosts creep around me so white and so stark
And the goblins make faces and leer.
They upset my porridge and tangle my hair,
They sit on my footstool and shriek,
A cauldron steams wickedly into the air,
And owl has a bat in his beak.
For Life seems a witch that will turn me to stone
And Time is a skeleton grim,
Both planning to rob me of flesh and of bone
And throw me to Death for a whim.
Then a knock at the door sharp and bold can be
heard
And I spring to my feet with a scream,
A tall stranger waits, and he utters no word,
But he conquers my terrible dream.
His eyes are as fearless as young Lochinvar,
His arms are as strong as the sea,
And the goblin jumps hurriedly back in his jar
While the witch grows as pale as can be.
The shutters fling wide at the sound of his voice,
The sun rises up in the sky,
“I am here, little girl, never fear, never fear,
Do not cry, precious baby, don't cry.”
Then the shrouds turn to sheets and the cauldron
rolls off,
And the eyes that so gleamed become rain in a
trough,
And the horrors that chilled me with fear fade
away,
In the light of your presence—my Prince of
the Day!

UNREALITY

I wonder, when we first see Paradise
If all its beauties will appear unreal;
If we will stretch out hands in breathless doubt,
The feathers of the angels' wings to feel!
Life's great events seem but Mirage, and yet
Their memory so lastingly endures.
I look into your eyes, beloved, Today,
And cannot realize I once was yours!

PUNISHMENT

Not with the lash of whips or crush of irons,
Does Conscience, Chinese-torturer, subdue,
But slowly, as the slowest drops of water,
His punishments descend on us anew.
The pressure of their slow, persistent falling
Shatters the soul at last, and it is cleft;
Until, like crumbling rocks against the breakers,
Only the fragment of a soul is left!

TO A DEAD CHILD

Only in dreams you came to us, our son,
Prince of our highest hopes and vain ambition,
And as the lightning flashes through a storm
Your face flashed in the light of some great
mission.

Hold your head proudly in that other land,
Serve your King there as you would serve Him
here;
Let your young soul shirk no appointed task;
Fear not to serve alone, for we are near.

And if your hand should need a human clasp,
Our parent-love is but a conflagration
That rending Time and Space will reach your
hand
In that great force which knows no separation!

AUTUMN

A desperate vampire flung from Summer's arms,
Madly she paints her face and dyes her hair
In one last wild attempt to seem more fair,
In fevered haste to concentrate her charms.
Her smile is dazzling, desperate and bold,
She decks her shivering form in red and gold,
She lights her fires with driftwood of Romance
And like Salome, whirls into a dance
That scatters all her raiment on the breeze,
That strips of youth and beauty all the trees.
Ashes of hope and summer dreams are lying
Beneath the fire that Autumn lit, while dying.

I LOOKED AT LIFE

I looked at Life, and once it seemed
 A panorama gay,
A kingdom of bright promise
 Where Youth should have full sway,
The Testament of Faith had willed
 It should be mine, some day.
Poor Youth! Ah, how the final truth appalls!

For now I know that Life is but
 A narrow passage-way,
So narrow it becomes as to obscure
 The light of day;
So narrow that my hopes and dreams
 Will have no room to stay,
Till it will crush me in its meeting walls.

REQUIEM

When I am dead, let down my hair
And close my eyes.

Dress me for bed. In that dark land
No suns will rise.

Fasten the shutters; carry off the light,
Fondly I wish this sweet-sad world good-night.

Once have I seen my soul on fire
Mount to the skies.

Once have I had my heart's desire—
So close my eyes.

TEPID

So you think you have been in love? Ah, I fear
Your "career" has not even begun!
You have no more been burned by the heat of
that flame
Than the South has been burned by the sun!

REJECTED.

It was but Chance that brought them
 Face to face;
Their eyes showed naked spirits
 In disgrace.
Unwillingly they halted, tried to smile;
"Hello! What were you doing all this while?"
His walk a bit unsteady; trembling hands
 Groped cigarettes.
Her lips a bit too red. She laughed: "War smiles
 On farmerettes."
"I thought you studied nursing," he had sighed.
"I thought you joined the army," she replied.

From the same piece of cloth these two were cut,
 Of natures strange.
Slaves to the most capricious law of all—
 The Law of Change.
War's pendulum had swung them near Redemp-
 tion,
Peace—brought them all the evils of Suspension,
Monotony had done its best to break them—
 Their lives derange.
Cursing the fate that raised Life's curtain then,
Praying they should not meet so soon again—
Masking their souls, they parted, but to search
 A wider range.

STILL LIFE

Oh, how they sicken me, paintings of "still-life,"
Apples, grouped carefully near a blue vase—
Vessels of glass, to give sharp vivid high-lights,
Flowers aslant in the sun's golden rays.
Models who need not the least relaxation,
Models who breathe not, and ask for no fees,
Art for an artist? Then give me the model
Who faints in a pose half so rigid as these!
Give me the tree tossing leaflets regardlessly
Down on my canvas, to make a strange flaw,
Give me the sunset which fades into twilight,
Ere I can paint all the colors I saw.
Give me the model whose lips droop in weariness
Holding the smile I am trying to sketch,
Lips that request with a pale human wistfulness:
"Please, will you let me have one little stretch?"
Still-life! What tangible ghosts of Monotony!
Stolid reminders of life's dismal "chores";
All of my life I have tried to escape from you,
Hideous models my spirit deplures!

VALUE

“They can only be great who have greatly suffered”;

So dictates the heartless old World.

“Ah, Torture, they prize you too highly!” the oyster

Cried out to the stone it impearled.

BAMBOO CURTAINS

INTERNATIONAL

Yes, all the women in the world
I'd represent to you—
From South Sea maid to Japanese,
The false ones and the true;
While you, an audience of One,
Would this, my caprice view,
Each nation underneath the sun—
I'd play its role for you!

THE FANGLSS SERPENT

She was Mona Lisa—robbed of her smile,
She was Venus—lying dead;
She was Cleopatra, minus her guile,
Medusa—without her head;
She was Circe—finding her wand mislaid,
Salome—who meant no harm,
Aurora lost in a mass of shade—
This Beauty—with no charm!

THE GIFT

My Fairy God-mother gave me a net,
A butterfly net, you see:
"Run into the field of Life and get
Each one of your moods for me.
Catch them and put them aside awhile,
Then let them fly off," said she.
So I captured the moods both great and small
And some were of horrible form,
But she said I could always make use of them all,
So I covered and kept them quite warm.
One morning I looked in their bright golden cage
And there I beheld a strange sight—
The moods I had cherished had ripened with age,
And turned into Verse, over-night!

SOUVENIR DE FRANCE

LA PETITE SOEUR DE NOTRE DAME

Elle était religieuse—cette petite Venus!

Ma foi! quelles yeux, si profonds comme la mer,
La bouche toute rouge est formée pour des
baisers—

Mais utilisée seulement pour prières.
La taille d'un Ange, même, parcequ'elle était
drapée

En sombre noir correctement sévère.
Sainte, elle est surement, dans le vieux couvent,—

Elle est Reine dans un Monde plus léger.
“Pardon, ma Soeur,” j'ai dit, un jour en passant,
Quand tous ses compagnions ont quitté d'elle,
“Mais pourquoi as tu choisi cette profession
Quand pour la beauté tout le monde appelle?”

“Ah”! Elle a criée, joliment distraite,
“Toujours vous hommes me tirez de ma
retraite,

Et—c'est à cause de vous que je me cache!

Votre inutile carrière chaque jour une fete!
Toujours cette invitation si aimable—

De servir dans le monde du vieux Diable!”

GELE

Rien chauffe que le feu—
Et tu sais que j'ai froid!
M'aimer tant que tu veux—
La Chaleur est notre droit!

AU CLAIR DE LA LUNE

Petit père de tout le Monde,
M'oublies pas,
Je t'en prie. Ta bénédiction
Donne à moi.

Comme le pauvre petit pierrot,
Chandelle morte, éteint mon feu,
Ouvre, de ta vie, la porte—
Toi, si pres de Dieu!
Comme, devant sa lumière pure,
Je peut voir un peu!

A MON COMARADE

Juges moi comme tu veux ;
La vie n'est pas toujours si douce.
Tu étais difficile, un peu,
Et—j'étais fatigué de tout.
Mais juges moi comme tu veux.

Nous étions plein de joie de l'Art,
Toi, si enchanté avec Elle,
Mais tu travaillais toujours à part,
Et J'étais seule, toute seule—mais belle!
. . . Peut-être tes raisons sont les mieux ;
Seulement—juges moi comme tu veux.





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